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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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DYING OFF OF FISH A MYSTERY

The disappearance of the great spring runs of smelts, which for several years have ascended the streams entering Georgian Bay and the north channel of Lake Huron, has the biologists puzzled. Enquiry at the Royal Ontario Museum has elicited the information that nothing is known about the cause of the death of vast numbers in Lake Huron in the summer and fall of 1943. In contrast to their virtual disappearance in Lake Huron smelts appear to be still increasing in Lake Superior and Lake Ontario as shown by increased spawning runs earlier this spring.

DO YOU KNOW that the Royal Ontario Museum houses the largest collection in existence of the once abundant but now extinct Passenger Pigeon?

INSECTS HAVE AN ANCIENT ORIGIN

Each year, during the summer, we are overwhelmed by the abundance of insects. There is no doubt that these creatures greatly exceed the number of other living animals of the world today.

A study of fossils proves that insects have an ancient origin. They are definitely known from the Carboniferous period, three hundred millions of years ago. By visiting the Royal Ontario Museum one may catch a glimpse of the insect life of the past. There one will find, exquisitely preserved in limestone, the gossamer-like forms of dragonflies, and entombed in bits of Baltic amber are the delicate remains of ants, bees, flies, locusts and beetles. Insects were abundant and widely distributed even in dim, distant days.

BIRDS HAVE THEIR HOUSING PROBLEMS TOO

"Where's there a house for rent?" How often these words are overheard to-day as distraught home-seekers search for living quarters in cities and towns already filled to overflowing with war workers and men and women training for the armed services.

Experts in the Division of Birds of the Royal Ontario Museum testify to the fact that the problem of finding a home is by no means confined to human beings. Such birds as the tree swallow and bluebird which depend on cavities in trees or fences for nesting are particularly hard-pressed. The number of such sites is limited because we cut down dead trees, fill cavities in live ones, and replace rail fences with wire. The introduction of the European starling has complicated the problem for native birds. The starling nests early and is already established in suitable sites when our own birds return from the south. The starling is quite aggressive and in disputes over nesting holes with other birds usually emerges the victor.

Even evictions are not unknown in the bird world. Sometimes a house sparrow will remove the straw-and-twig furnishings of a purple marten home without apology.

Still, the capacity for making the best of a bad job is characteristic of birds as well as man. Like him, birds manage to find shelter somewhere and proceed with the all-important business of establishing a home.

THE BRIDE LOOKED LOVELY

Wedding bells rang out in June, 1876, and the bride swept down the aisle, heavily veiled and wearing a dress consisting of at least 20 yards of heavy white corded silk. The dress is now on exhibition in the costume gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum. With it are shown the dress the bridesmaid wore at the same wedding, and the bride's going away costume. All three dresses are made in the elaborate bustle style that was the fashion of the period.

The bridesmaid's dress is particularly attractive, and is made of blue-green silk trimmed with row upon row of lace flounces. The going-away outfit is a much more sombre and sensible affair, consisting of a bottle-green silk dress trimmed with matching fringe, and over it a three-quarter length padded silk coat, cut in the new mannish style that was just coming in in 1876.

PLEASE, WHERE ARE THE MUMMIES?

Guards at the Royal Ontario Museum report that nine out of ten people visiting the Museum want to see the Egyptian mummies. This exhibit holds more shivers than a combined ghost story and mystery thriller. Its real importance lies in the fact that it illustrates a burial custom five thousand years old, one unique in the history of mankind. Mummification, an attempt to perpetuate physical life by complicated embalming and ritual, gradually developed in complexity from about 3,000 B.C. to its highest point of elaboration about 1,000 B.C. The burial of objects to be used in the mummy's physical life after death naturally developed as a consequence.

Practically all our knowledge of ancient Egyptian daily life comes from the tombs. That this daily life is far more interesting that the mummies themselves you can easily prove by a few hours in the Egyptian galleries. Here the life of the past can be reconstructed from the Museum's collections of jewellery, toilet articles, tools, weapons, furniture, sculpture, stone and decorated clay vases, etc.

BURNSIDE COLLECTION GIFT TO MUSEUM

Three centuries of English, French and Dutch furniture are included in the gift of the late Mrs. Josephine Eaton Burnside, now on exhibition in the Royal Ontario Museum. The collection contains more than seventy pieces of furniture, as well as five dessert services and many other examples of fine English porcelain, thirty-five pieces of old silver and Sheffield plate, a group of modern English silver, almost fifty pieces of table glass, a superb crystal chandelier and a pair of table candelabra, five Persian prayer rugs of the finest weave, a large 17th century Flemish tapestry, two 18th century carved marble mantels of the Adam period, and a small group of Chinese and Japanese porcelain.

MUSEUM HOURS

When in Toronto you will find the Museum open free from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. War conditions make it necessary to close the building on Monday. A 15c. admission charge is made on Wednesday and Friday.